

UCLA Faculty Association

News and opinion from Dan Mitchell since 2009

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Thursday, September 11, 2025

Columbia's AI Solution?

Divisive topics

- Sex and gender identity
- Israel-Palestine
- Race and racism
- Tariffs and tax cuts
- Immigration
- Guns
- Addiction
- Homelessness



swaybeta.ai

Introducing Sway

SwayBeta

From [The Verge](#): Can AI help “smooth over” discussion on abortion, racism, immigration, or Israel-Palestine? Columbia University sure hopes so. The Verge has learned that the university recently began testing Sway, an AI debate program currently in beta. Developed by two researchers with backgrounds in philosophy and psychology, Sway matches up students with opposing views to chat one-on-one about hot-button issues and “facilitates better discussions between them,” according to the tool’s website. Nicholas DiBella, a postdoctoral scholar at Carnegie Mellon University who helped develop Sway, told The Verge that about 3,000 students from more than 30 colleges and universities have used the tool.

One of those may soon be Columbia. News of the potential partnership comes after more than two years of escalating tensions at Columbia between students, administrators, and the federal government. The university has spent years at the center of controversy after controversy: expulsions of pro-Palestinian student protesters, a string of police raids, and demands from the federal government.

People at Columbia’s Teachers College are testing Sway in order to potentially integrate it into the conflict resolution curriculum and “bridge-building initiatives at Columbia,” DiBella said. He said there’s also been interest from other teams at Columbia in using Sway for the fall 2026 semester and onward. Simon Cullen, the other developer behind Sway and a visiting research professor of civil discourse and AI at UNC-Chapel Hill, told The Verge that the company is also in touch with Columbia University Life.

Sway places an “AI Guide” in every chat that “asks tough questions to improve student reasoning.” The tool also “suggests a rephrasing” for language it deems disrespectful. One example debate topic laid out in Sway’s intro video: whether or not the US “should prioritize Palestinian rights and stop sending weapons to Israel.” ...

The potential Sway partnership is not the only way Columbia is reportedly using tech to screen or shape students’ convictions. The university is also reportedly using Schoolhouse Dialogues, a tool offered by Sal Khan of Khan Academy’s nonprofit, to pair high school students with opposite viewpoints on controversial topics, then rank each other’s “civility” — and Columbia could use that feedback in its admissions decisions...

Full story at <https://www.theverge.com/ai-artificial-intelligence/770510/columbia-university-sway-ai-to-cool-off-student-tensions-israel-palestine-protests>.

Note: A Sway introduction video is at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KJ4qIlZoZfM> or click on the link below:

The Council of UC Faculty Associations

- Faculty are fighting back
- Faculty Lawsuit Demands Public Access to Trump Administration’s Settlement Demands on University of California
- Coalition of UC unions condemns Trump’s attacks on the UC and the California economy
- Stand up for values in the face of Trump’s \$300 million cut to UCLA scholars
- Faculty leaders comment on UCB Chancellor Lyon’s appearance before House Committee on Education and the Workforce

Remaking the University

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- [Liner Note 38. The University of California’s Charlie Kirk Tribute Act](#) - 9/16/2025
- Why Should We “Stand Up for the UC?” (Guest Post) - 9/1/2025

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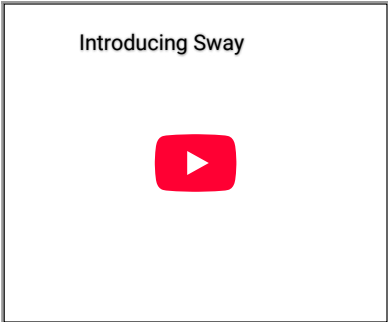
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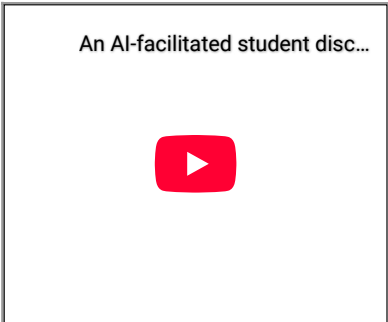
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A sample Sway debate is at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oWISi7nN8s4> or click on the link below:



Posted by California Policy Issues at [3:15 AM](#) No comments:

Labels: [admissions](#), [Carnegie Mellon](#), [Columbia](#), [U of North Carolina](#)

Sept. 11, 2001



UCLA students watch TV newscast of attack on World Trade Center, Sept. 11, 2001.

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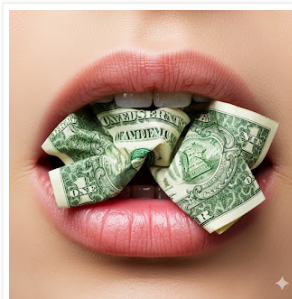
Labels: [miscellaneous](#), [UCLA](#)

Wednesday, September 10, 2025

The money-where-the-mouth-is problem - Part 2

UCLA got a mention in the governor's "letter" yesterday commemorating the 175th anniversary of the State of California:

*"...When the President threatens to bankrupt UCLA — an engine of innovation and economic prosperity, a world leader in science and medicine — with his own bankrupt ideas, he will fail." ...**



But as we have previously noted,** exactly what the state will do in terms of budgetary support to bring about that failure is not mentioned.

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*<https://www.gov.ca.gov/2025/09/09/on-175th-anniversary-of-statehood-governor-newsom-delivers-2025-state-of-the-state-letter-to-california-legislature/>.

**<https://uclafacultyassociation.blogspot.com/2025/09/the-money-where-mouth-is-problem.html>.

Posted by California Policy Issues at [9:18 AM](#) No comments: 

Labels: [governor](#), [politics](#), [public funding](#), [UCLA](#)

Nobody told Los Angeles Magazine...



...about UCLA's \$80 million acquisition of the campus of the defunct Marymount California University. It's still listed in the magazine's latest edition in a compendium of local universities and colleges. At this point, maybe the less said about this purchase, the better.

Posted by California Policy Issues at [3:30 AM](#) No comments: 

Labels: [UCLA](#)

Straws in the Wind - Part 97

From the [Washington Post](#): *The Education Department has cut off funding for campus-based child care at over a dozen colleges, accusing the schools of conflicting with the Trump administration's policies by teaching young children about gender and race or prioritizing diversity in hiring. Grants from the Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS) program are a critical source of money for public colleges that educate large populations of students with limited financial means. The \$80 million federal program provides four-year grants to more than 200 colleges and universities that support child care on campus or in the surrounding community. Now, some of those schools will likely be scrambling to cover child care costs as the school year begins.*



...The fate of CCAMPIS has been in question for months. Student advocates and congressional Democrats grew concerned when the department failed to issue an application for this year's grant, which would normally be released in May and close in July. Because Donald Trump's proposed budget for fiscal year 2026 calls for eliminating the program. ...Education Department spokesperson Ellen Keast said... that some of the rejected recipients would have taught children between the ages 2 and 5 about gender identity and racial justice. Other colleges, she said, prioritized the hiring of child care staff based on "immutable characteristics, not merit." ...

Full story at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2025/08/29/education-department-child-care-college/>.

From [Inside Higher Ed](#): *Brown University will give money to some of its graduate students whose federal research grants were cut by the Trump administration, The Brown Daily Herald reported. "We want to make sure that we're able to give each of you all of the attention and support that you need to get through comfortably [and] well supported," Janet Blume, interim dean of the graduate school, said at a Graduate Student Council meeting... She said the university will honor the financial commitments of M.F.A. and Ph.D. students who lost their grants.*

The National Institutes of Health, the National Science Foundation and other federal agencies have terminated thousands of academic researchers' grants—including many at Brown—that don't align with the Trump administration's ideological agenda. Blume said Brown is also reducing its graduate student admissions target this year to allow "time to work out issues of the federal financial landscape and also shifts in the job market." ...

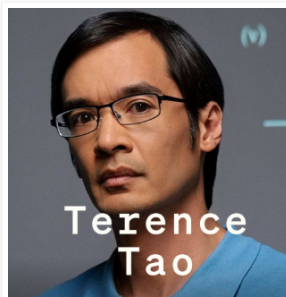
Full story at <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/quick-takes/2025/09/05/brown-fund-grad-students-who-lost-grants>.

Posted by California Policy Issues at [3:20 AM](#) No comments: 

Labels: [Brown University](#), [diversity](#), [politics](#)

Tao

From the [Washington Post](#): *Terence Tao is often called the "Mozart of Math." A child prodigy born in Australia, Tao, 50, is now at the top of his field at the University of California at [sic] Los Angeles, working in the rarefied realms of partial differential equations or harmonic analysis on problems so hard it may take a PhD to understand them. But for the past few weeks, he's been preoccupied with more run-of-the-mill pecuniary concerns: fundraising.*



Being one of the world's greatest mathematicians didn't protect Tao from losing his National Science Foundation grant in late July, when the Trump administration froze about half a billion dollars in federal research funding after accusing UCLA of mishandling antisemitism and bias on campus.

A court order restored National Science Foundation grants, including Tao's. But no new awards can be made, putting at risk the Institute for Pure and Applied Mathematics (IPAM), where he is director of special projects...

Math and politics don't often intersect, but Tao is speaking out about how upheavals, delays and uncertainty in federal funding imperil the unique American ecosystem for science. He spoke to The Post about the events of the last few weeks, the appeal of doing research in the United States and why math matters. This interview has been lightly edited for clarity and length.

Q: What happened to your current grant?

A: I got an email from a journalist from the Bulwark. He first told me that my grant had been suspended and ... then he also mentioned casually that the IPAM, the math institute here also

got defunded. And that's a grant that's 40 times bigger than my own. And much, much more serious. Suddenly, we didn't have the operating funds to run for three months.

Because of previous delays in funding, I didn't have enough money to fund my own summer salary. I was already delaying that for one month. And so, yeah, it's still delayed, but that's fine. I can take it. But IPAM, they didn't have the reserves to operate for more than a few months. So basically, for the past two weeks or so, we've been in an emergency fundraising mode. I've been meeting with lots of donors...

Q: A lot of people that I've been speaking to, researchers in different fields, have said that they'll be okay because they're more senior. But they've expressed a lot of concern about early career researchers and scientists.

A: The NSF grant that I had, I mean its primary purpose was to support my graduate students, give them the opportunity to travel to a conference, which is really important for career development at that stage, to buy them out of teaching for one quarter so that they can work on research. And, you know, at that career level, having a paycheck for \$3,000 really makes a difference...

Q: Do you have a sense of optimism or would you ever consider leaving the U.S.?

A: I've had a very positive experience at the U.S. for 30 odd years ... It offers so many things that are definitely not perfect, but you feel like things can happen here, really good things... The things that you took for granted, there was bipartisan support to keep certain things in the U.S. running as they have been more or less for the past 70 years because the system worked. That's not a safe assumption anymore.

Full interview at <https://washingtonpost.com/science/2025/09/07/science-math-trump-federal-cuts-grants>.

Posted by California Policy Issues at [3:10 AM](#) No comments: 

Labels: [fund raising](#), [public funding](#), [UCLA](#)

Will Harvard Continue to Lead the Charge? - Part 57



From the [Harvard Crimson](#): Harvard won a milestone legal victory on Wednesday when a judge struck down the Trump administration's freeze on \$2.7 billion in federal funds — but government agencies still have options to keep federal dollars out of the University's hands. The White House vowed within hours of the ruling to file an appeal, and it may take weeks of court clashes — at least — before the fate of the frozen funds is decided. But legal experts said the administration could move separately to reduce the volume of new grants reaching Harvard through administrative or political channels, bypassing the courts entirely. Most federal research grants, including those from the National

Institutes of Health and National Science Foundation, are awarded competitively, with institutions from across the country — Ivy League and public alike — submitting proposals evaluated on merit.

That means grant reviewers have latitude to deprioritize Harvard in the process, not through formal policy but via informal discretion inside agencies. Because grant decisions involve subjective judgments, experts said such shifts are hard to detect and harder to contest, making them a likely path for the Trump administration to limit funding without incurring a legal fight...

And just hours after [Judge] Burroughs issued her ruling, a White House spokesperson asserted that Harvard "remains ineligible for grants in the future" — a position first formalized in May directive from Education Secretary Linda E. McMahon, which barred the University from receiving new federal awards. While Burroughs' opinion prohibits the federal government from "refusing to award future grants, contracts, or other federal funding" to Harvard on unconstitutional grounds, it does not address informal efforts to sideline Harvard through discretionary or opaque grant decisions. And those efforts, once difficult, may now be easier to carry out. An Aug. 7 executive order signed by President Donald Trump transferred authority over federal grant decisions to political appointees, instructing them not to "routinely defer" to career scientists or peer review panels...

Full story at <https://www.thecrimson.com/article/2025/9/4/trump-options-federal-funding/>.

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Labels: [Harvard](#), [politics](#)

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